

2.7. Expand tourism seasons through local coordination

This Strategic Action strengthens Montana's tourism product development and marketing efforts, and builds respect for the tourism industry in Montana.

Recommended Tactics

Regions, CVBs, Communities, Tribes

- » Collaborate to identify clear seasonal boundaries based upon availability of local tourism assets and historical tourism flows.
- » Collectively identify tourism assets and/or niche markets that could be strengthened or utilized more extensively to extend the existing season(s).
- » Assess the feasibility, individually and collectively, of extending the opening of amenities to match extended tourism seasons.
- » Coordinate seasonal opening and closing of amenities, matching the availability of tourism assets as closely as possible and ensuring that visitors will have access to all necessary amenities.
- » Publicize local economic gains derived from the extended or consolidated season(s).

Businesses & Organizations

- » Participate in local efforts to coordinate seasonal openings and closings.

Indicators of Success

- » Businesses and organizations in a community have shared expectations regarding the start and end of tourism season(s), supporting reliable expectations that all necessary amenities will be available for their visitors.
- » Income generating seasons are stretched to the fullest extent, within staffing and management constraints.

Background & Rationale

Tourism in Montana is, fundamentally, a seasonal industry. This seasonality poses many challenges for tourism-related businesses and organizations, particularly in regard to staffing and financial viability. The financial challenges of seasonality can be mitigated by extending the stronger season(s). Many stakeholders in community sessions indicated that the fall season (September-October) has grown in recent years or holds potential for growth. Some indicated that the spring season, though more challenging, offers some potential for niche market growth (e.g. wildlife viewing).

The full potential of peak and shoulder seasons is not realized in some cases due to the lack of coordination among the local providers of tourism products and services. Dates of opening and closing are not coordinated and in some cases are not predictable. By coordinating the availability of attractions and amenities, visitors could be assured of access to all the components of a good visitor experience. Visitors will not arrive at an open attraction to find no services in town or book lodging only to find that dining is not sufficiently available.

Better coordination provides predictability for businesses and organizations, allowing them to market to visitors with confidence that the complementary products and services will be available. It significantly reduces the risk of being unable to deliver a good visitor experience due to circumstances beyond their control. Similarly, it benefits the competitiveness of the destination by reducing poor visitor experiences and negative word-of-mouth.

A coordinated approach may also allow the destination as a whole to extend its season, consolidating the recognized potential of the spring and fall seasons.

Extending existing seasons to tap this potential, however, is often constrained by staffing difficulties, as seasonal staffing often draws upon a student population that cannot extend into the spring or fall. Other sources of staffing – such as international workers – pose their own difficulties, including additional administrative burdens for hiring or language difficulties. Managerial constraints also exist, in that some operators prefer a shorter season and will be unwilling to extend their operations. These structural problems must be considered when determining the feasible length of the operating season.